

Paddling The Zumbro River

The Zumbro River flows through the southeastern part of Minnesota and encounters a diverse array of natural communities. The river has few rapids but paddling skills are needed in order to maneuver with the current and to avoid snags.

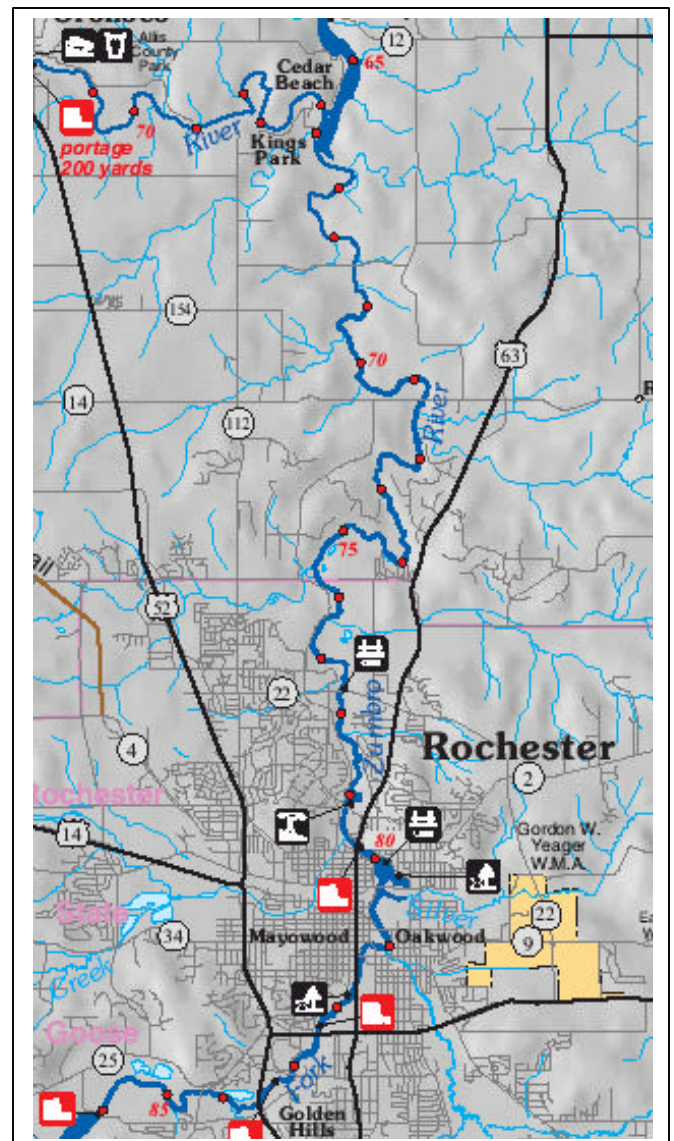
Water characteristics - Canoeists expecting to drift down the Zumbro may be taken by surprise. At even moderate levels the river has a lively current and travelers must keep a lookout to avoid the many snags they're liable to encounter.

The Zumbro's original name aptly describes this aspect of the river. The French called it Rivere des Embarras, meaning river of difficulties. The snags, caused by widespread bank erosion, hindered the canoes of the French voyagers engaged in the fur trade. Erosion has also obliterated a small waterfall which was once located just above the town of Zumbro Falls. At the site of the falls the river now flows rapidly over a sandstone rubble bed.

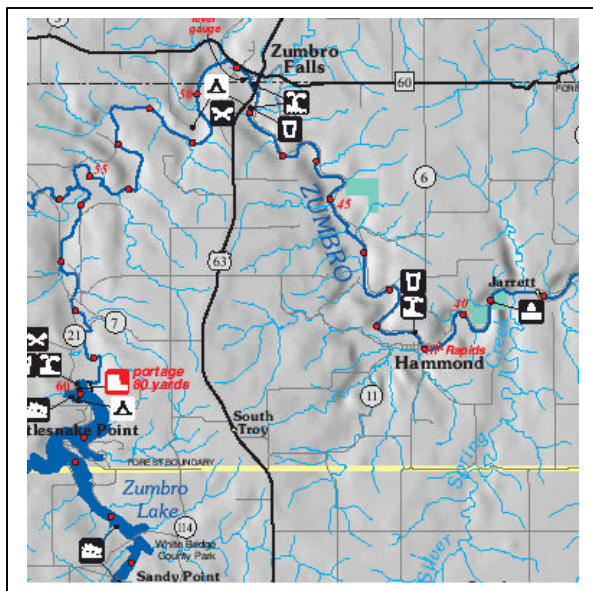
A stretch of mild rapids at Jarrett presents a rocky obstacle course during low water. Usually a very shallow, muddy river, the Zumbro's water level depends largely on the flow at the Rochester power dam. The dam operators generally release water on weekends, raising the level sufficiently for canoeing. The river's level may also rise dramatically and dangerously after rainstorms producing flash floods. When flash floods are likely to occur, there is generally a four-hour lag between storm and flood.

Landscape - Limestone and sandstone bluffs watch over the

Zumbro River as it winds through southeastern Minnesota to the Mississippi. The Zumbro flows through a deep narrow valley hemmed in by rocky cliffs for much of its length below the Rochester power dam (river mile 60). Below Theilman to the river's mouth, however, the valley widens considerably and farmland stretches away from the banks. Woods and marshes along the river offer a gentle contrast to the striking bluffs. Trees in the river valley are predominantly elm, box elder, willow and cottonwood, with some walnut.



Fish and wildlife - The Zumbro is a good fishing river; anglers can take catfish, smallmouth bass, bullheads and suckers. According to the most recent Minnesota Department of Health Advisory (1997), children under six and women of childbearing years should not eat any fish caught above the Zumbro Lake Dam. Below the dam, they can eat smaller catfish (under 20") smallmouth bass and white sucker. Others should eat no more than one meal a month. Wildlife that can be found along the river includes deer, fox, grouse, bald eagles, and herons. The open marshes provide important habitat for sandhill cranes and moorhens.



Cultural Information - This area served as a gateway for cultures moving north. The "Mississippian Tradition", a striking example of cultural development, moved northward about A.D. 900 to 1000. The people farmed the fertile bottom land and built villages on terraces above the rivers. In the 1640's, with the onset of European exploration, France claimed this part of the "New World". The newly formed United States, in turn, bought it from France as part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. The native Dakota Indians continued to inhabit the land until the 1852 Treaty of Traverse de Sioux forced their removal. European immigrants cleared hardwood stands and fields were cultivated. Poor land management led to catastrophic erosion, which gradually led the people of southeastern Minnesota to initiate wiser use of the land. The state established the Richard J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood Forest to assist in restoring the area and promote sustainable land use.

Source: the MN Dept. of Natural Resources

